

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, PATIENT WARDS 201, 202,  
203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208 & 209 - TYPE A PLAN  
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Building Nos.  
1189, 1190, 1191, 1192, 1193, 1194, 1195, 1196 & 1197)  
(Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center)  
(Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center)  
7601 Imperial Highway, bounded by Esperanza Street, Hawthorn  
Avenue, Laurel Street, and Descanso Street  
Downey  
Los Angeles County  
California

HABS CA-2800-A  
*HABS CA-2800-A*

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### PATIENT WARD 201 (TYPE A)<sup>1</sup>

(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1189)  
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center

HABS No. CA-2800-A

**Location:** 7601 Imperial Highway, located within the block bounded by Esperanza Street on the north, Hawthorn Avenue on the east, Laurel Street on the west, and Descanso Street to the south. Patient Ward 201 faces south onto Descanso Street.

U.S. Geological Survey Los Angeles Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:  
11S392599 N; 3754121E

**Present Owner / Occupant:** County of Los Angeles

**Present Use:** Vacant

**Significance:** Patient Ward 201 represents one of two types of ward buildings found on the Rancho Los Amigos Historic District. Documentation of Patient Ward 201 represents all patient ward buildings of Type A. Constructed from 1923 to 1928, 13 Patient Ward buildings provided hospitalization for chronically ill patients at the Los Angeles County Poor Farm. The County Poor Farm began in 1887/1888 as an agricultural facility that provided work, housing, and medical care for the indigent to relieve the overburdened Los Angeles County Hospital system. By the 1910s, an increasing number of inmates with chronic medical disorders were being admitted to the Poor Farm, causing a transition from providing rehabilitative, short-term treatment for the impoverished to a long-term patient care facility that eventually became the Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center. The Patient Ward Buildings were the first buildings constructed at the institution strictly to provide ward space for these chronically ill patients. Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center is significant as an example of early twentieth century healthcare of Los Angeles County's indigent population and for its later treatment of those in Los Angeles County with chronic illnesses, both mental and physical. In 1995, seventy-six buildings located in the South Campus area of the former Poor Farm were determined eligible for listing as a historic district in the National Register of Historic Place, and as a result, the South Campus was

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<sup>1</sup> Representative example of Patient Ward Nos. 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208 and 209 which were constructed with the same "Type A" plan.

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automatically listed in the California Register of Historical Resources.<sup>2</sup> The Patient Ward Buildings were listed as contributors to the Historic District.

## **PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION**

### **A. Physical History:**

1. **Date of erection:** 1923
2. **Architect:** County of Los Angeles Mechanical Department
3. **Original and subsequent owners:** County of Los Angeles (1887/1888–present)
4. **Original and subsequent occupants:** County of Los Angeles (1887/1888–present)
5. **Builder, contractor, suppliers:** County of Los Angeles Mechanical Department
6. **Original plans and construction:** Original architectural drawings for Patient Ward 201 are on file with the County of Los Angeles.
7. **Alterations and additions:** Over the years, Patient Ward 201 has experienced alterations to its exterior and interior. In 1936, the screen porch was permanently enclosed to provide additional ward space. This included replacement of the original screen panels with double-hung one-over-one light windows. Additional alterations occurred circa the 1980s, when the building was converted into a general services office. At this time, a one-story, square, concrete connector was attached centrally to the east elevation to provide access to Patient Ward 202. Additional alterations included the replacement of original windows and doors on the south-facing façade and north (rear) elevation, reconfiguration of interior spaces, and removal of original interior fabric and materials.

### **B. Historic Context:**

Constructed from 1923 to 1928, the Patient Wards were part of a large building program initiated by William Ruddy Harriman, the superintendent of the Los Angeles County Poor Farm who historically had the most sustained impact on the development of the institution. Harriman is credited with rebuilding the County Poor Farm after the damage caused by a flood in 1914 and with making numerous improvements to the campus with funds made possible by the financial surge that followed World War I. Harriman began expanding the campus in 1921, and within a year had started construction on four Patient Ward buildings (Building Nos. 201, 202, 203, and

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<sup>2</sup> McAvoy, Christy J., Historic Resources Group. 26 July 1995. *Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, Primary Record and District Record*. Los Angeles, CA.

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204). This project signaled the transition of the farm from a rehabilitative care facility for indigents into a hospital to house long-term invalid patients.

By 1923, the first four wards had been completed and an additional four were under construction (Building Nos. 205, 206, 207, and 208). Approximately 130 bedridden patients were transported by ambulance from County Hospital to be housed in the new wards.<sup>3</sup> By 1926, eight wards were completed and a ninth ward was under construction (Building No. 209). A total of 260 invalid patients were housed in the wards, with additional patients transferring to the South Campus at a continual rate.<sup>4</sup> By 1928, thirteen wards had been completed (Building Nos. 210, 211, 212, and 213) and all were filled to capacity with a waiting list of some 200 patients. The rising patient population dictated exterior alterations to its wards in an effort to increase capacity. In 1936, the sleeping porches on the wards were permanently enclosed and equipped to handle the care of fifteen additional patients.

Although the Patient Wards were constructed over a period of several years, they were constructed with matching style and materials and share the same character-defining features. The historic plans for the buildings indicate that plans were drafted for two different ward styles referred to in original architectural drawings as Type A and Type B. These two types varied slightly in appearance and could be distinguished from each other by their west elevations. Type A included Patient Wards numbered 201-209 and featured a single square projection on the south side of the west elevation. Type B included Patient Wards numbered 210 -213 and featured a square projection on both the north and south sides of the west elevation.

The ward buildings continued to house terminally ill patients until the mid-twentieth century, when Rancho Los Amigos began focusing on hospital development in the expanding area north of Imperial Highway ("North Campus"). Once the buildings were no longer needed as hospital wards, they were converted into nursing facilities, medical labs, office space, and storage, and many alterations were made to the interiors of the buildings. Circa 2000, two of the Type B Patient Wards (Building Nos. 212 and 213) were demolished and the remaining Patient Wards were vacated.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, p. 105.

<sup>4</sup> Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, pp. 118–119.

<sup>5</sup> Aerial Photographs of Rancho Los Amigos. c. 1930–c. 2002. Los Angeles: University of Southern California Archives. Box 29, Folder 27.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURE INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. **Architectural character:** Patient Ward 201 is representative of the Type A patient ward building, its description and features apply to all Type A patient ward buildings. Patient Ward 201 is one-story with horizontal massing and a rectangular plan. The building is sited on a north-south orientation and sits parallel to the other Patient Ward buildings. The wood Vernacular style of the building is best characterized by the horizontal massing and rectangular plan, continuous veranda on the south-facing façade, medium-pitched complex roof consisting of gable and hipped projections, linear bands of windows, and projecting screened porches.
2. **Condition of fabric:** The current condition of the Patient Ward 201 is poor. Left vacant for many years, the building has deteriorated from neglect, vandalism, and exposure resulting in the current state of disrepair. All exposed building materials have disintegrated, the windows and doors have deteriorated, and the interior has suffered major alterations and has been vandalized.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall dimensions:** The original architectural drawings for Patient Ward 201 revealed that the building stands approximately 12 feet in height. The exterior building measurements are 162'-10" wide by 35'-11" deep. The net interior condition space, interior dimensions exclusive of covered or enclosed exterior spaces, calculates to 3,697 square feet. The total square footage for the enclosed condition space, including exterior dimensions and covered or enclosed spaces, calculates to 5,583 square feet.
2. **Foundations:** Patient Ward 201 is sited on a raised concrete slab foundation.
3. **Walls:** The exterior walls of Patient Ward 201 consist of plaster over wood lath. The building generally reflects a vernacular aesthetic of sparse architectural ornamentation, emphasized by exposed structural elements and materials displayed in their natural state or painted in earth-toned hues. On the east elevation of the building, wood paneling trims the exterior base of the screened porches and small rectangular screen vents provide ventilation beneath the raised concrete foundations.
4. **Structural system, framing:** Patient Ward 201 is a simple wood-framed structure.
5. **Porches:** Two porches are present on Patient Ward 201. The east elevation of the building consists of a full-width sleeping porch which was originally screened on the upper half and finished with wood siding on the lower half. The porch is

capped by a shed roof extension projecting from the main roof. In 1936, the screen porch was permanently enclosed to provide additional ward space. This included replacing the original screen panels with double-hung one-over-one-light windows.

The second porch area is located on the south elevation and consists of a full-width veranda which connects Patient Ward 201 to the other Type A Patient Wards (Building Nos. 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, and 209). A composition-shed roof extends from the main roof with exposed beams and trusswork covering the porch. The porch roof is supported by wood posts which rest on a raised concrete slab walkway.

6. **Openings:** The fenestration of Patient Ward 201 can generally be characterized as large, symmetrically arranged, wood-framed, one-over-one-light and one-light hopper sash with transoms set in a linear configuration that provides a continuous rhythm across the building. The windows are surrounded by simple wood casings and have slightly projecting sills.

The east and west elevations are pierced by bands of wood-framed one-over-one-light, double-hung wood-sash windows with transoms and one-light hopper-sash windows with transoms. The south facade features a pair of double-hung windows with transoms separated by a single-wood-paneled and glazed door with transom. The north (rear) elevation contains a pair of double-hung windows with transoms separated by a double-wood-paneled door with transoms. Original wood-paneled doors with transoms are also centrally located on the east elevation of the building, providing access to the sleeping porches.

7. **Roof:**

- a. **Roof shape, covering:** Patient Ward 201 is surmounted by a medium-pitched, front gable-on-hipped roof sheathed in composition shingles. The roof features a gable projection at the south end of the west elevation roof which caps a projecting square bay.
- b. **Cornice, eaves:** Moderately overhanging eaves are characterized by exposed rafter tails and braces.
- c. **Dormers, cupolas, towers:** Three gabled dormer vents are located on the south roof elevation, and two are located on the north roof elevation. The vents consist of wooden horizontal slats. A skylight consisting of steel framed lights is present to the immediate south of the ridgeline on the south elevation. A square metal ventilator projects from the center of the skylight.

- C. **Description of Interior:** Original 1923 architectural drawings are attached; due to alterations when Patient Ward 201 was converted to a General Services office in the 1980s,

the original interior spaces and features were completely lost. Originally, Patient Ward 201 was divided into ten spaces which included: two staff bedrooms, a linen room, an office, a shower, a bathtub room, a toilet room, a diet kitchen, the hospital ward area, and the screened porch. Currently, the building's interior has been subdivided into individual office spaces, and the original hospital room divisions have been altered and the original features have been removed.

**D. Site:**

1. **General setting and orientation:** The setting of Patient Ward 201 as it exists today reflects the post-1925 era of the County Poor Farm when the property was transitioning from a poor farm into a living/working hospital facility. The building is located at the northwest corner of the intersection of Hawthorn Avenue and Descanso Street (originally named Patient Drive), with the remaining ten Patient Ward buildings sited in a row west of the building in a parallel formation. To the east of Patient Ward 210 is the Historic Power Plant Complex. Patient Ward 201 is located on the block bounded by Descanso Street to the south, Esperanza Street to the north, Hawthorn Avenue to the east, and Laurel Street to the west. The building is situated adjacent to the street frontage of Descanso Street and faces south toward the south and west quadrants of the South Campus area, where a portion of the historic farming operations were conducted. The existing raised concrete sidewalks and ramps can be seen in historic photographs and provided access for patient drop-off and other services to the ward buildings. The significance of the south-facing orientation is evident by the prominently raised veranda that provided a continuous viewing vista for the invalid patients of the historic farming activities. The north (rear) elevation faces Esperanza Street, the Kitchen and Employee Dining Room, and Staff Cottages and is significant because of its street frontage and secondary entrance for staff and patients. The east and west elevations exhibit many of the same character-defining characteristics as the north and south elevations; however, they are considered to be secondary private elevations as they generally face toward the interior of an adjacent ward and are less visible from street view.
2. **Historic landscape design:** During the initial construction of the Patient Ward buildings, a new road was created to extend directly south of the buildings, which was named Patient Drive (now called Descanso Street); this east-west-running road served as a western continuation of Consuelo Street and provided necessary access for the dozens of newly hired employees needed to oversee the growing invalid population of the campus. A continuous, raised veranda was constructed to connect the southern elevations of the Patient Wards to provide fresh air and views for the patients, as it was believed to assist with their recovery and relieve their ailments. In addition, the gardens were planted around and between the buildings to provide a pleasant, calming atmosphere for the patients and to continue the visual setting of the South Campus, which resembled a park rather than a hospital. Vestiges of these original plant gardens currently surround the building.

### **PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

#### **A. Architectural Drawings:**

The original architectural drawings prepared by the County of Los Angeles Mechanical Department are located on file with the County of Los Angeles. A set of as-found drawings were prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documentation in 2007 by Diamond West Engineering, Inc. for the County of Los Angeles.

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**E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:**

None

**F. Supplemental Material:**

Historic photographs  
Reduced copies of original architectural drawings  
Reduced copies of 2007 as-found architectural drawings  
Aerial map

**PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION**

HABS documentation for Patient Ward 201 was prepared by Sapphos Environmental, Inc. from December 2006 to September 2009 on behalf of the County of Los Angeles Chief Executive Office (CEO). The HABS documentation serves as mitigation to comply with the

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Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed County Data Center project. Measured surveys and the creation of as-found drawings were carried out in 2007 by Ms. Wanda Ostermann of Diamond West Engineering, Inc., Los Angeles, California. Photographs were taken in from July 2007 to July 2008 by Mr. David Lee, production manager, and Mr. Clarus Backes, senior resources specialist, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part I of the historical report (historic context) was prepared by Ms. Shannon Carmack, senior resources specialist, Ms. Rebecca Silva, senior resources coordinator, Ms. Deborah Howell-Ardila, senior resources coordinator, and Ms. Laura Carias, cultural resources analyst. Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part II of the historical report (architectural information) was prepared by Ms. Rebecca Silva, senior resources coordinator, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Ms. Leslie Heumann, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. manager of cultural resources, reviewed the final report and supporting documents, and provided research, writing, and project oversight.